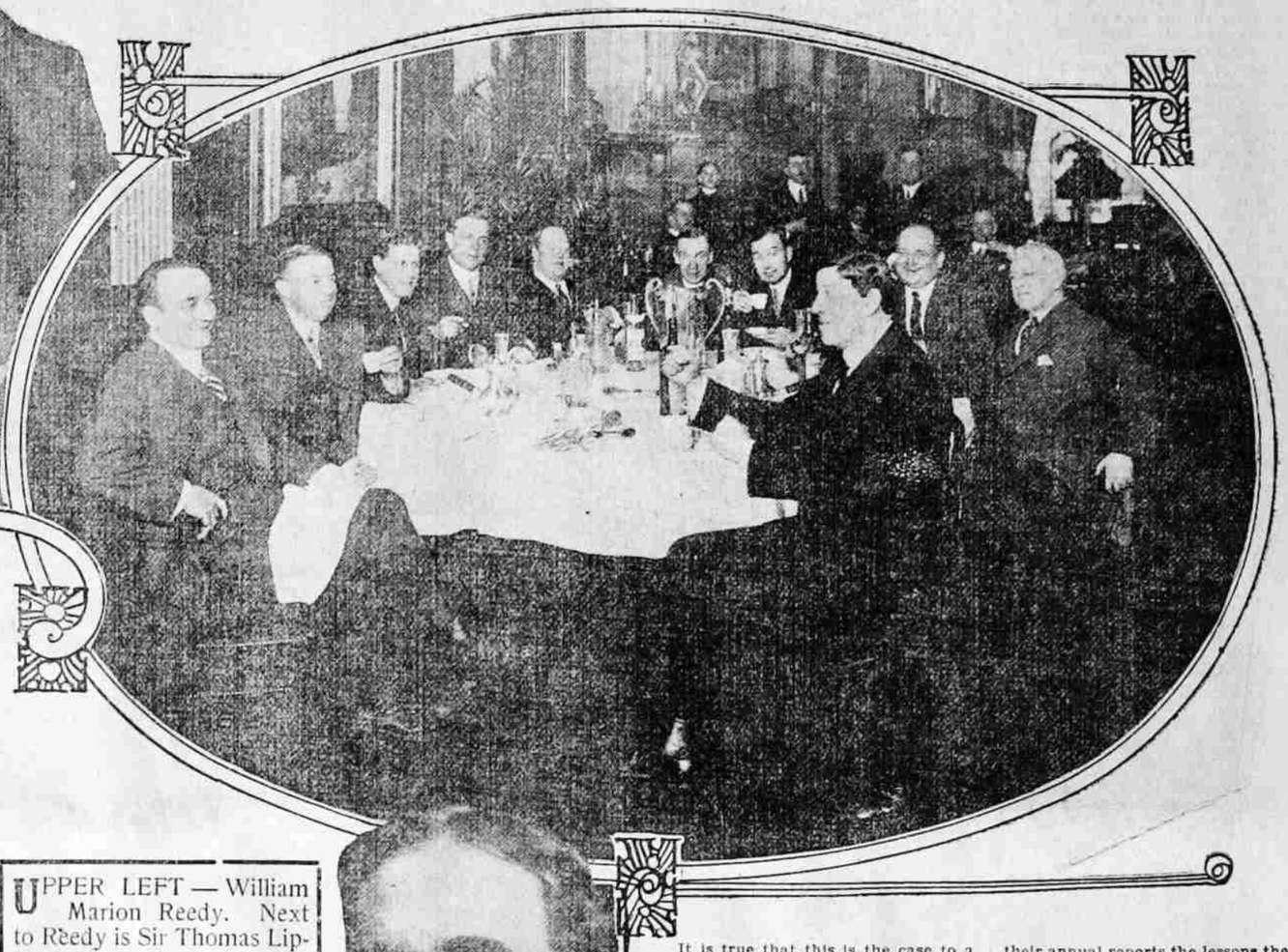
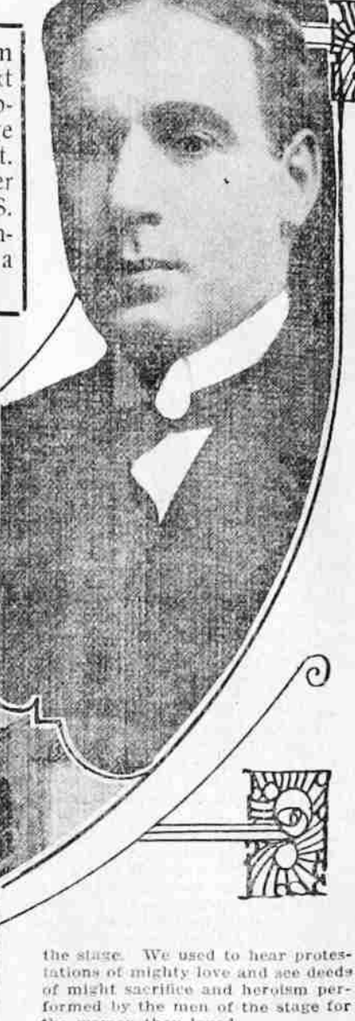
WHIP CRACKERS of the After-Dinner Speech

The Best Banquet Orator Is He Who Says the Least and Because of His Condensed Manner of Talking He Usually Is Made Toastmaster





UPPER LEFT — William Marion Reedy. Next to Reedy is Sir Thomas Lipton. Lower left is George W. Perkins. Below—Capt. Roald Amundsen. Lower right—Ambassador R. S. Naon. Upper right—Members of the Lamb's Club at a banquet.

Would you like to be a good after-dinner speaker? If you are born with the gift of oratory you probably will succeed. If you are just an ordinary speaker, it will take long training to bring out the speaking ability and win success with an audience.

The first requisite is ease of manner, and is something few of us have. The most successful men for after-dinner speeches are actors. They learn to be at east while hundreds of strange eyes are turned on them. They are used to being where there are no friends to sympathize with them in their mistakes.

Now, the surest way to win friends when making a speech is to say something they like. It is not necessary to impart information. Tell them something that will move their sympathies and they will applaud with vigor. Tell them something that will make them laugh and they will call you blessed. Tell them something which they believe thoroughly and always have believed and you are in their eyes an orator.

But the subject-matter is not of as much importance as the delivery. The crowd likes to hear a man speak who has an easy manner of delivery and who says what he has to say without much effort, who talks as though his words flowed from his lips without any effort on his part.

Such an orator was Webster. Among the present-day orators we find men on the stage, on the lecture platform, in our national Congress and in the pulpits of our churches who can qualify as orators. But all orators are not good after-dinner speakers and all after-dinner speakers are not first-class toastmasters.

One of the after-dinner speakers who the people delight to hear is George Perkins, the financier. Perkins is both a speaker and a writer. His writings in the last presidential campaign were powerful arguments for Theodore Roosevelt. William Jennings Bryan, who is a noted orator, is not so good an after-dinner speaker as former President Taft. Taft is excellent at repartee and his hits at an after-dinner speech won all who heard him to him.

William Marion Reedy, the writer, has a national reputation for his quickness of speech. He talks like he writes and is a pleasing after-dinner speaker.

Crossing the water we find Sir Thomas Lipton of England, the famous sportsman, who is a good speaker and loves to talk and listen, too. Americans recently had opportunity to hear Captain Amundsen, discoverer of the South Pole, who is a lecturer of force, but who is as good at an after-dinner address as he is on the lecture platform.

Ambassador Naon of Argentine Republic has more than an international fame for his pleasant address. He has delighted many Americans by his rapid fire talk when the occasion demanded.

But the whip cracker of the after dinner speech is the toastmaster. The toastmaster is an American institution. It is true they have toastmasters in England and France, but America has developed the toastmaster to a higher state than they have across the water. It is said of Benjamin Franklin that when he was attending a banquet in Paris he was given a toast, "George Washington." An English orator paid glowing tribute to his own land, referring to England as the golden sun. A Frenchman giving a toast to France called it the silver moon. Franklin wanted to get a good word for George Washington. He said:

"Here's to George Washington, the Joshua of America. He commanded the sun and moon to stand still and they stood still."

After that they made Franklin toastmaster. He was too good to be a simple after dinner speaker. Since his time the banquet has become a recognized part of the American life. We have banquets for everything. It is the great American game for winter.

The man who can guide a large dinner of tired merchant princes and financiers through an evening so that the guests leave for their homes feeling that they have had a profitable as well as an enjoyable time—such a man makes himself marked among men. He is an ideal toastmaster.

To the average man an invitation to "make a few remarks" after dinner is at once a terror and a secret pride. To be asked to be the toastmaster at a big dinner is usually taken as recognition of wit and knowledge.

The toastmaster's speech should be very brief. If he is a good speaker himself, a speech of any considerable length imposes unfair competition upon the real speakers, usually visiting guests, whom he is to introduce. If the toastmaster is a poor speaker, he bores the audience and the waiting guests as well. And in any event, every minute occupied by the toastmaster is a robbery of the time of the real speakers of the evening—and an after dinner speaker may have a real message that needs delivery, and the long drawn introduction, with sidelights and anecdotes, will really cheat the audience of something worth while.

The toastmaster has a task of courtesy—to prepare the diners for the man who is to speak, to tame and train the audience into a proper frame of mind, and to turn it over to the speaker informed as to his identity, prejudiced in his favor a little, perhaps, but certainly not in the reaction following a laugh raised by the toastmaster.

War to Figure in Plays.

"People used to be content with one climax in the third act. Now they want four third acts."

With this epigram, Charles Klein, whose new play, "The Money Makers," is proving a big success, sums up the theatrical situation as it is today.

"The unrest of the times is so great," said Mr. Klein, "that it takes something tremendous and vital in the way of a play to stir people. There is a great unrest abroad in the land. The war in Europe is simply one expression of it. It is felt industrially, economically; it is felt in every phase of modern day life. To turn the attention of the people from their own woes we need plays which are expressive of the conditions of today, and which suggest a remedy for those conditions. People no longer want the traditional love scene in their drama. How often, in these days, do you see a proposal of marriage on the stage?

"The things that people used to demand and expect of their theaters they are now outgrowing. Nietzsche, Ibsen, Shaw have taught men and women that the world in reality is not the world as is seen on the stage. We used to hear protestations of mighty love and see deeds of might sacrifice and heroism performed by the men of the stage for the women they loved.

"People liked this at first. They liked to see a young girl who has been wronged by her lover enter in a gown of black to the accompaniment of low music. If they see the same thing now they smile at it, for they know that this is not the way such women appear in real life. They don't want the pink and white sugar coating of romantic love nowadays. We playwrights find that the scope of our work has been decreased. We must work with realities, with life worn threadbare down to its realities.

"That is what I have tried to do in my recent plays. I began as far back as the time more than twenty years ago when I wrote 'The District Attorney.' That play was the first to make my name known. It foreshadowed the investigation of the District Attorney's office and the indictment of a corrupt judiciary which followed. People, in seeing and reading my plays have credited me with a sense of prophecy. They say that in each of my plays some big event in the financial or political world has been foreshadowed. It is true that this is the case to a surprising degree.

"My latest play, which was written a year ago, might have had the New Haven scandal for its basis. But that I am actually a prophet of specific events is untrue. I am simply sensitive enough to impressions and familiar enough with present day conditions to feel the trend of things. When matters are going along a certain way a certain logical conclusion may be drawn; the general premise of the punishment of dishonesty and evil, for instance.

"This country has been for the past many years plunged into a reign of terror. It was the terror of dishonesty and corruption which was everywhere, in our politics, in our judiciary, in every branch and phase of our public work. I have simply used these conditions in the creating of my plays, and events have followed the conclusions I have drawn. 'The Lion and the Mouse' was a play of national corruption—corruption of the Senate by the trusts. 'The Third Degree' was a story of police corruption. 'The Gamblers' of a banking combine. 'The Money Makers' is a drama of railroad corruption and its results, which is almost exactly paralleled in the New Haven debacle."

Even while he was speaking Mr. Klein's attention wandered. "I can't help thinking how insignificant all of this is,' he said, "in face of what is happening in Eurbpe. What does it matter just how about the condition of the drama? It seems like discussing the color of neckties while downstairs a friend is being murdered. The plays of the future, if they pretend to a reason for being, must deal with such things as war and peace.

"The people who used to be content with sickly tales and plays of romance have had a great awakening. The stress of today has 'stabbed their spirits broad awake.' My hope for the future is to put into my play my ideas as to what patriotism really is—patriotism which is something more than aggression.

"The play of the future must emphatically deny the Nietzschean doctrine of blood and iron, the belief that war is good, and peace alone is immoral. It must show far more strongly than has ever been shown before the fallacy of the system that allows a handful of men the privilege of saying that 4,000,000 of soldiers must go forth to kill a second 4,000,000 of soldiers. I sit here and speak of drama and all the time I am wondering. Are my children to be forced to give up some of the best years of their lives, are they to be forced to the payment of an impossible tax, by the triumph of militarism? That is the vital question of the present day. The big plays of today and tomorrow will preach universal disarmament.

European War Lessons.

Secretary Garrison and Secretary Daniels will lay before Congress in their annual reports the lessons they believe the army and navy of the United States should draw from the war in Europe.

No extraordinary expenditures have been asked for by either the War or Navy Departments in the annual estimates already filed with Congress, but the two Cabinet heads will discuss in detail the best methods of obtaining a mobile and adequate army and a powerful and efficient fleet.

Garrison will endeavor to concentrate the attention of Congress and the country on the necessity for a definite national military policy, extending over a period of years.

Spectacular raids of submarines in the European war have drawn attention to the fact that last year Congress appropriated more than $4,000,000 for submarines, and specified that one of these should be a sea-going vessel. European submarines have been able to make only comparatively short voyages from their bases, and the great cruiser submarine planned by American naval officers, bids for which are soon to be opened, will eclipse anything of the kind seen in the present war.

Daniels will probably ask for money enough to provide a second submarine of the sea-going type, and the usual number—seven or eight—smaller submarines for coast and harbor defense. Naval strategists with whom Secretary Daniels is conferring do not believe there should be any change in the plans set forth by the General Board several years ago in the programme of two battleships per year, and a proportionate number of auxiliaries and submarines. Mr. Daniels has publicly stated that the General Board still believes in the battleship unit as a necessary line along which the American Navy should advance.

It is conceded among naval men, however, that Congress will discuss the advisability of using the appropriation ordinarily made for a single battleship for the building of twenty-eight new submarines. By sacrificing one battleship, the American navy could at one stroke step alongside England and France in submarine strength.

One of the chief recommendations the navy will make to Congress will be an increase in personnel. It is estimated that 18,000 more men than are now provided for by acts of Congress will be required to man the present fleet, including ships under construction.

Garrison will seek to obtain from Congress a definite settlement of the problem of an adequate regular army with the progressive development of a policy analogous to that formulated by the General Board for the navy a decade ago, when the programe of two battleships per year was adopted.